

Building  
the  
Tatmadaw

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# Building the Tatmadaw

Myanmar Armed Forces Since 1948

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INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES  
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*This work is dedicated to the  
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the University of Mandalay*



# CONTENTS

<i>List of Tables</i>	viii
<i>List of Figures</i>	x
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>Glossary</i>	xii
1 Introduction	1
2 Military Doctrine and Strategy	16
3 Organization and Force Structure	47
4 Armament and Force Modernization	105
5 Military Training and Officer Education	135
6 Financing Force Modernization and Troops Welfare	163
7 Conclusion	193
<i>Appendices</i>	209
<i>Bibliography</i>	240
<i>Index</i>	247
<i>About the Author</i>	255

# LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1	Myanmar Waters	2
Table 2.1	The Growth of Tatmadaw Manpower	33
Table 3.1	Bureau of Special Operations, 2008	74
Table 3.2	Organizational Development of the Tatmadaw, 1948–89	77
Table 3.3	Reorganization of Command Structure, 1961	79
Table 3.4	Light Infantry Divisions	79
Table 4.1	Air Defence Systems and Ranges	112
Table 4.2	Procurement of Aircraft (1948–62)	124
Table 4.3	Procurement of Aircraft (1962–88)	126
Table 4.4	Procurement of Aircraft (1988–2003)	128
Table 5.1	Defence Services Medical Academy	149
Table 5.2	Defence Services Technological Academy	150
Table 5.3	Defence Services Institute for Nursing and Paramedical Science	151
Table 5.4	NDC Intakes and Trainees	158
Table 6.1	Defence Expenditure (1962–74)	164
Table 6.2	Defence Expenditure (1975–80)	165
Table 6.3	Expenditure in the 1980–81 Fiscal Year	166
Table 6.4	Expenditure in the 1999–2000 Fiscal Year	167



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Table 6.5	Percentage of Defence in the Union Government Expenditure (1980–88)	168
Table 6.6	Percentage of Defence in the State Administrative Organization Expenditure (1980–88)	169
Table 6.7	Defence Expenditure as Percentage of GDP	170
Table 6.8	Defence as a Percentage of Union Government Expenditure	171
Table 6.9	Defence as a Percentage of State Administrative Organization Expenditure	172
Table 6.10	Defence Expenditure	173
Table 6.11	Number of Firms under the UMEHL	177
Table 6.12	Profit Making and Distribution of the UMEHL	178
Table 6.13	Factories under the MEC in 2006	183

# LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1	The Tatmadaw Command Structure, 1948	52
Figure 3.2	The Tatmadaw Command Structure, 1958	54
Figure 3.3	Division Commanders and their Training Backgrounds (September 1988–February 2008)	64
Figure 3.4	Division Commanders and their Training Backgrounds (2002–07)	65
Figure 3.5	The Command Structure of the Tatmadaw by Region (1948–61)	92
Figure 3.6	The Command Structure of the Tatmadaw by Region (1961–72)	93
Figure 3.7	The Command Structure of the Tatmadaw by Region (1972–89)	94
Figure 3.8	The Command Structure of the Tatmadaw by Region (1989–98)	95
Figure 3.9	The Tatmadaw Command Structure, 1988	96
Figure 3.10	The Tatmadaw Command Structure, 1998	97
Figure 4.1	Tatmadaw-Yay's Procurement of Warships	118
Figure 4.2	Procurement of Aircraft between 1948–2006	129

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# GLOSSARY

2IC	Second-in-Command
ABRO	Army of Burma Reserved Organization
AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
AG	Adjutant General
APC	Armoured Personnel Carrier
ASO	Adjutant Staff Officer
AWCS	Advanced Warning and Control System
BATD	Burma Army Training Depot
BCP	Burma Communist Party
BEDC	Burma Economic Development Corporation
BIMS	Battlefiled Information Management System
BSO	Bureau of Special Operations
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
BTF	Burma Territorial Force
BWS	Burmese Way to Socialism
C <sup>3</sup> I	Command, Control, Communication and Intelligence
CAFTO	Chief of Armed Forces Training
CGE	Central Government Expenditure
CGSC	Command and General Staff College
CIPS	Central Institute of Political Science
CO	Commanding Officer
DDSI	Directorate of Defence Service Intelligence
DI	Defence Industries
DMT	Directorate of Military Training
DSA	Defence Services Academy

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DSAS	Defence Services Administration School
DSCFS	Defence Services Combat Forces School
DSI	Defence Services Institute
DSIB	Defence Services Intelligence Bureau
DSIC	Defence Services Intelligence Centre
DSMA	Defence Services Medical Academy
DSNCOS	Defence Services Non-Commissioned Officers School
DSTA	Defence Services Technological Academy
DVB	Democratic Voice of Burma
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
ELINT	Electronic Intelligence
EW	Electronic Warfare
GDP	Gross Domestic Products
GPS	Global Positioning System
GSO	General Staff Office / Officer
HIMAD	High to Medium Altitude Air Defence
IG	Inspector General
IO	Intelligence Officer
JAG	Judge Advocate General
KMT	Koumington
KNDO	Karen National Defence Organization
LAWS	Land/Air Warfare School
LIC	Low Intensity Conflict
LID	Light Infantry Division
MAG	Military Appointment General
MANPADS	Man-portable Air Defence System
MAS	Military Affairs Security
MBT	Main Battle Tanks
MCTI	Military Computer and Technological Institute
MEC	Myanmar Economic Corporation
MIS	Military Intelligence Section
MOC	Military Operation Command
MP	Member of Parliament
MWVO	Myanmar War Veteran Organization
NBSD	North Burma Sub-District
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NDC	National Defence College
NLM	New Light of Myanmar (newspaper)
NUF	National United Front
OSS	Office of Strategic Studies

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OTS	Officer's Training School
PBF	Patriotic Burmese Force
PLA	People's Liberation Army (China)
QMG	Quartermaster General
QSO	Quartermaster Staff Officer
RC	Revolutionary Council
RFA	Radio Free Asia
RMA	Revolution in Military Affairs
ROC	Regional Operation Command
SAC	Security and Administrative Committee
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile
SAO	State Administrative Organizations
SBSD	South Burma Sub-District
SEADS	Suppression of Enemy Air Defence System
SEE	State-owned Economic Enterprises
SHORAD	Short Range Air Defence
SIGINT	Signal Intelligence
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SSM	Surface-to-Surface Missile
TGE	Total Government Expenditure
TOC	Tactical Operation Command
UMEHL	Union of Myanmar Economic Holding Limited
UMP	Union Military Police
USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

# 1

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## INTRODUCTION

Ever since Myanmar regained its independence in January 1948, the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces) has been crucial in restoring and maintaining law and order. It is one of the most important institutions in Myanmar politics. During the civil war of late 1940s and early 1950s, the Tatmadaw suppressed both communist and separatist insurgencies, restored law and order, and maintained peace and stability. While it had engaged in counter-insurgency operations, the Tatmadaw also had to drive foreign aggressors out of the country. However, in October 1958 as the political situation began to deteriorate to such a point that a national security crisis was imminent, the civilian government of the time, at the intervention of some senior Tatmadaw commanders agreed to transfer state power to the Tatmadaw. On 28 October 1958, the Tatmadaw formed the Caretaker Government to restore political stability and to hold general elections; it finally held general elections in February 1960 and subsequently transferred state power back to the elected government. As a political crisis had been looming large again, the Tatmadaw this time staged a military *coup d'état* in the name of the Revolutionary Council (RC) on 2 March 1962. By the end of April, the RC declared the Burmese Way to Socialism (BWS) as its nation building programme. The Tatmadaw leadership subsequently founded the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) in July 1962 to lead the socialist revolution in Myanmar. The Revolution Council rule came to an end only when a new constitution was promulgated and general elections were held to restore a constitutional government in 1974. Since January 1974, the Tatmadaw accepted the political leadership of the BSPP. Only in September 1988, did the BSPP allow Tatmadaw personnel to resign membership from the party. Then on 18 September 1988, the Tatmadaw took over the state again in the name of the State Law and Order

Restoration Council (SLORC), renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) on 15 November 1997.

Myanmar has a total land area of 667,000 square kilometres (261,228 square miles), measuring 936 kilometres (581 miles) from east to west, and 2,051 kilometres (1,275 mile) from north to south. It is situated in Southeast Asia and is bordered on the north and northeast by China, on the east and southeast by Laos and Thailand, on the south by the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, and on the west by Bangladesh and India. It is located between latitudes 09 32'N and 28 31'N, and longitudes 92 10'E and 101 11'E. The length of its contiguous frontier is 6,159 kilometres (3,828 miles) and its coastline from the mouth of the Naaf River to Kawthaung is 2,228 kilometres (1,385 miles). The total length of the Myanmar-Bangladesh boundary is 271 kilometres (168.7 miles). It consists of two parts, namely the Naaf River boundary of 64 kilometres (39.5 miles), and the land boundary of 208 kilometres (129.2 miles). The total length of the Myanmar-China boundary is 2,204 kilometres (1,370 miles); of the Myanmar-Thailand border, 2,107 kilometres (1,309.8 miles); the Myanmar-India border, 1,338 kilometres (831.8 miles); and the Myanmar-Laos border, 238 kilometres (147.9 miles). It has 29,043 square nautical miles of internal waters and 9,895 square nautical miles of territorial waters (see Table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1  
Myanmar Waters

<i>No.</i>	<i>Myanmar Waters</i>	<i>Sq Nautical Mile</i>
A	Internal Waters (shore to baselines)	29,043.6380
B	Territorial Sea Waters (baseline to TS line)	9,895.1860
C	Contiguous Zone (TS line to CZ line)	9,879.7018
D	Exclusive Economic Zone (CZ line to EEZ line)	92,392.1250
Total area of Myanmar waters		141,210.6508

*Notes:* TS = Territorial Sea

CZ = Contiguous Zone

EEZ = Exclusive Economic Zone

*Source:* Ministry of Defence, Myanmar.

Myanmar also has an airspace that covers both land area and territorial waters. In terms of population, it was estimated that in 2006 Myanmar had more than 52 million people. The Tatmadaw is entrusted with the defence of this land, sea, air, and people.



Despite its significant role in Myanmar, little has been made public about the defence policy and missions of the armed forces. Only in February 1999, for the first time since its existence of more than half a century, did the Tatmadaw quietly declare its defence policy and its missions. The declared policy outlined the doctrine of “total people’s defence” for the Union of Myanmar. By enshrining the “*Our Three National Causes*” — non-disintegration of the Union; non-disintegration of national solidarity; and perpetuation of national sovereignty — as its national interests (later known as national ideology), the SPDC declared that its national objective is to “build a peaceful, modern and prosperous nation”.<sup>1</sup> This is to be pursued through “twelve objectives”, which are equally divided into three areas: political, economic, and social.<sup>2</sup> In the view of the present regime, the political objectives will lay the foundation for a disciplined, flourishing democracy in Myanmar. The economic objectives reflect the important role of the state in national economic life. Although a market economy is seen as a desirable form of economic system, its implementation will be nationalistic and somewhat socialistic. The social objectives draw extensively on an appeal to nationalism by the current regime. Through these measures, in the view of the regime, the peaceful, modern and prosperous Union of Myanmar will have a “multiparty democratic society with a market-oriented economy based on noble principles of justice, liberty and equality and will ensure the national identity and cultural traditions of all the national races”.<sup>3</sup>

In order to pursue the national objective of building a peaceful, modern, and prosperous nation, the Tatmadaw leadership decided to transform the existing armed forces into a force that is “modern, strong, proficient and highly capable”.<sup>4</sup> It is in this context that the Tatmadaw has defined its defence policy and the mission of the defence forces. In his speech to senior commanders in July 1997, Senior General Than Shwe explained Myanmar’s defence policy and the missions of the defence forces for the first time. However, nothing was released to the public until February 1999. The document contains a lengthy discussion on the genealogy of the present-day Tatmadaw and claims that the Tatmadaw was born as a freedom fighter for national independence. It also states that “in the light of Myanmar’s historical background, the geographical location, socio-economic conditions and overall situation of the region, Myanmar’s national defence policy can be understood and appreciated”. It continues:

Safeguarding Myanmar’s own national interest is also conducive to the building of peace, security and economic progress in the region, the salient features of Myanmar’s national defence policy are:

- (a) To perpetually safeguard national values concerning independence and sovereignty and prevent all acts detrimental to the three main national causes which are non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of the national solidarity and perpetuation of national sovereignty;
- (b) To build national defence avoiding external dependence as much as possible in striving for stability of the state, community peace and tranquility and prevalence of law and order based on the strength of national forces within the country and with the armed forces as [the] pivot, combining the strength of auxiliary defence forces;
- (c) To valiantly and effectively prevent interference in our internal affairs[,] deploying various ways and means while avoiding interference in the internal affairs of other nations; and
- (d) To employ a defence system that gives priority to world peace, regional tranquility in accord with the five principles of peaceful co-existence.

In connection with the defence policy, the Tatmadaw declared its missions, which are:

- (a) To build a strong, capable and modern Tatmadaw[,] involving the auxiliary forces in order to dutifully work for the materialization of our three main national causes: non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of the national solidarity and perpetuation of national sovereignty;
- (b) To form a modern people's defence system for national defence and security involving the entire citizenry[,] based on internal forces without depending on foreign elements;
- (c) To abide by the provisions of the state constitution and to safeguard the new nation that will emerge according to that constitution for sustained development;
- (d) To train and develop a strong defence force which possess [sic] [a] military, political, economic and administrative outlook in order to participate in the national political leadership role in the future state; and
- (e) To always carry in the fore and safeguard the twelve objectives of the state in order to see the further burgeoning of the noblest and worthiest of worldly values such as justice, liberty and equality to guarantee [the] security of national economic [sic] interests and freedom and security of citizens.

The document states that, in keeping with the principles of non-alignment and peaceful coexistence, which have been the basic tenets in moulding its

security policy, Myanmar never takes sides with contending parties, but tries its best to maintain friendly relations with all countries, and particularly, with neighbouring countries. It states, “Myanmar has never allowed and never will allow the stationing of foreign forces on its soil against the interest of a neighbouring country” and “has no security cooperation agreement with any country”. Believing that “the strength of the nation lies within”, the document claims that “Myanmar has not taken part in any joint military exercise with foreign armies and its military posture is purely defensive”, and its defence policy is basically self-reliant. However, it does not give threat perceptions, doctrine and strategy, force structure, armament, and training; in fact, there is no official document released for public consumption.

Here, although some aspects may be irrelevant to the Tatmadaw, I would like to give a brief overview of the conceptual framework for analysing military capability. In analysing the military capability of a nation, it is important to look at military doctrine and strategy, organizational structure of the armed forces, armament or weapon acquisition, and military leadership and training regimes; whether they could produce firepower, protection, mobility, and so on. They are usually in line with the principles of war accepted in each and every individual military force. Here, the “principles of war” mean fundamental ideas and rules that set the standard for victory in the war. They encompass not only principles, but also fundamentals, factors, maxims, laws, and elements of war. While “military doctrine” is defined as fundamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of national objectives — authoritative but requiring judgment in its application — “military strategy” is the art and science of employing the armed forces of a nation to secure the objectives of national policy by application of force or the threat of force.<sup>5</sup> To some, strategy is “the art of the general”.<sup>6</sup> Almost every military has its own accepted principles of war and, on the basis of a threat environment, it defines, adopts, and follows a particular military doctrine and strategy. The principle of war provides general guidance for the conduct of war at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. These principles help the military in planning, preparing, and waging armed combat. They also help the military organize, equip, and train the troops. In line with the principles of war, the military formulates and applies certain military doctrine and military strategy. In spite of new developments in military technology and war-fighting methods, scholars argue that the fundamentals in the battlefield have remained relatively unchanged since the beginning of the twentieth century. There is of course, a rapid growth in the reach, lethality, speed, information-gathering potential, and so on of armies. However, these new developments in military technology still require

the application of combined arms, cover and concealment, tightly integrated suppressive fire and manoeuvre, and defence depth and reserves in regular conventional war. Indeed, they have actually increased their importance. They are key factors in determining the military capability of an armed force.

Air power is another important aspect of military capability in modern armed forces. An air force generally needs to perform three broadly defined missions: air superiority; air mobility; and air combat support missions. In detail, these will include defensive and offensive counter air operation, close air support, airborne early warning and control, air interdiction or surgical air strike, electronic warfare, air reconnaissance and surveillance, anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface ship operations, strategic airlift, strategic bombing, suppression of enemy air defence, tactical air transport and mobility, combat search and rescue, and so on. Depending on the type of missions and degree of effectiveness or competence in performing these missions, an air force could be judged as an air power or not. John Warden III, a modern air power theorist, argued that “no country has won a war in the face of enemy air superiority, no major offensive has succeeded against an opponent who controlled the air, and no defense has sustained itself against an enemy who had air superiority”.<sup>7</sup> This statement could be disputed especially in the context of asymmetric or irregular warfare. To Warden, air superiority is the first goal and all other operations must be subordinated to its attainment, with an exception that close air support is absolutely necessary for the ground campaign.<sup>8</sup> Robert Pape, however, argued for the importance of strategic or interdiction bombing in winning a war.<sup>9</sup> It is not for me here to debate who is right about the air power theory, but just to make a point about the importance of air power in modern warfighting. Air power could be both tactical and strategic. Tactical air power implies the use of aircraft and other air power components to operate in conjunction with, and in relations to, the operation of military forces on land or on sea. It is designed and employed to undermine the enemy’s military capabilities in the battlefield. Strategic air power, on the other hand, involves the use of aircraft independently of the surface force for the purpose of destruction, disruption, and dislocation of the enemy war-waging machine in its totality, so as to degrade the enemy’s overall capabilities to wage war and/or increase the costs of waging war to an unacceptable level.

Air superiority is achieved when there is “a degree of dominance in the air battle of one force over another which permits the conduct of operations by the former and its related land, sea and air forces at a given time and place, without prohibitive interference by the opposing force”.<sup>10</sup> A high degree and continuous state of “air superiority wherein the opposing air force is incapable

of effective interference” is generally considered as air supremacy.<sup>11</sup> It is also known as air dominance. Air superiority, therefore, involves retaining the initiative and freedom of action of all elements of one’s own military power in the face of hostile air power, while denying it to the enemy. Air superiority is perhaps the surest way of providing for air defence of friendly ground and naval forces and safeguards their freedom for action and manoeuvre. To attain and maintain a desired degree of air superiority, the air force needs to conduct counter air operations which are designed to destroy or negate enemy aircraft and missile, both before and after launch. Counter air operations include both offensive and defensive missions. Offensive Counter-Air Operation is “an operation mounted to destroy, disrupt, or limit the enemy air power as close to its source as possible” whereas Defensive Counter-Air Operation is the “all defensive measures designed to detect, identify, intercept, and destroy or negate enemy forces attempting to attack or penetrate the friendly air environment”.<sup>12</sup> Counter-air operations could be conducted as air-to-air and air-to-ground wars. Another important element for achieving air superiority is the Suppression of Enemy Air Defence System (SEADS) that is both hard- and soft-kill. For this purpose, an air force needs air superiority fighters, interceptors, ground attack aircraft, multi-role fighter, and helicopter gunship.

But it is important to understand that air superiority or air supremacy could last only as long as enough air effort is devoted to it.

Air Mobility is another important aspect of an air power. Air transport operation, both strategic airlift and tactical airlift, using fixed-wing and helicopter, play a key role in modern warfare. Airborne Operation, another aspect of air mobility, is also vital in the modern-day battlefield. Combat support missions can enhance the effectiveness of other air power missions as they constitute a force multiplier. The missions cover operations of Advanced Warning and Control System (AWCS), Electronic Warfare, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (including maritime patrol), the Command, Control, Communication and Intelligence (C<sup>3</sup>I), and In-flight refuelling. Air combat support involves attacking ground targets from air, especially military installations, economic, and industrial zones. Strategic offensive primarily concerns strategic bombing and surgical air strike against high-value targets. Air interdiction and close air support come under tactical offensive. While tactical interdiction is confined to areas and targets close to the battlefield, strategic interdiction implies penetration deep into hostile territory. Close air support is provided for the friendly force in the battlefield. Both anti-submarine warfare and anti-surface ship operations fall under the category of maritime strike. This mission is taken against the hostile naval force. Pre-emptive and surgical air strikes have increasingly become attractive in modern warfare.<sup>13</sup>

Another aspect of military capability is naval power. Naval capability could be assessed on the basis of the different naval platforms (surface ship, submarines, and aircraft) and weapon systems (mines, guns, torpedoes, cruise missile). Most navies maintain a balanced mix of fleet platforms and weaponry as modern naval warfare becomes multidimensional. Two important pillars of a navy are to affect events on land and to control use of the sea. A navy could be classified based on its operations: open or high seas, coastal waters and straits, littoral waters or in-shore waters, off-shore waters, and inland waters. Moreover, depending on the size and nature of the fleet, geographic reach, function and capability, access to high-grade technology, and reputation, a navy could generally be classified as a global navy or regional navy or coastal navy. A global navy or major naval power will have functions of strategic deterrence, power projection, sea control, naval diplomacy, national security and constabulary, and humanitarian assistance. But a regional navy lacks strategic deterrence and has only limited power projection and sea control capabilities. Coastal navies have only limited sea control even over their own waters, but have a certain degree of sea denial, and capability to engage in national security and constabulary missions and humanitarian assistance within their waters.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of naval operations, the highest priority is the command of the sea. Thus, a navy could project military power into the sea, for the purpose of sea and area control, and from the sea, in order to influence events on land. The most important goal of naval forces is perhaps to ensure sea control, broadly defined as a guarantee that the sea can be used freely, and that the enemy is limited to fugitive use. A navy can utilize the sea without significant opposition from the enemy. In many cases, sea control is transitory; often the area controlled is limited. Below sea control is sea denial, in which neither side can use the sea fully. Sea control is the ability to maintain use of the sea, which, in turn, usually means keeping an enemy's attackers from sinking friendly ships. Power projection refers to the ability to attack land targets, either with weapons, which may be carried by aircraft, or by landing troops. Aircraft carriers could be described as power projection assets, while frigates or patrol aircraft, as sea control assets. The offensive use of the carrier exemplifies an important truth: sea control and power projection can be two aspects of the same thing. Depending on a number of factors, some navies seek only sea denial, or local or temporary sea control. The power projection method of gaining sea control combines two tactics: decisive battle and attack at source. Convoy is a better-known sea control strategy. In a sense, it is a form of the decisive battle strategy. Convoy offers a series of battles of annihilation on a small scale. Carrier

battle group could be regarded as a gigantic convoy, combining the most attractive targets with the deadliest counter measures. Convoy is effective only if there are enough escorts, and the number of escorts is set not by the strength of the opposing force, but rather by the number of convoys that must be protected.<sup>15</sup> Sea denial is preventing an opponent from using the sea without attempting to establish local sea control. The submarine is perhaps the most prominent naval platform. A navy's effectiveness also depends on its ability to conduct sea surveillance.

There are a number of books and articles on the history of the Tatmadaw, particularly for the period before Myanmar's independence in 1948, which shed light on the formation and political orientation of the Tatmadaw.<sup>16</sup> Before the early 1990s, a few scholars have contributed to the study of the Tatmadaw. Most of the books, edited volumes, and articles are about the involvement of the military in politics, civil-military relations, and the performance of the "military regime".<sup>17</sup> There were only a few publications on the military, or security matters as such.<sup>18</sup> However, since the early 1990s, there has been a resurgence of academic interest in Myanmar. Many books and articles on Myanmar in general, and the Tatmadaw in particular, came out in the 1990s. Various aspects of the Tatmadaw have been studied. The most notable area of study has been the performance and the political role of the military.<sup>19</sup> Yet many of them fail to reflect the complexity of the situation. Another area of study is the counter-insurgency aspect of the Tatmadaw, in relation to various insurgencies in Myanmar.<sup>20</sup> A few scholars deal exclusively with the military capabilities of the Tatmadaw,<sup>21</sup> and strategic and national security issues of Myanmar.<sup>22</sup> There are also a number of theses on the Tatmadaw, but, to the best of my knowledge, none of these is on military capabilities.<sup>23</sup>

Here, I would like to draw attention to the works of Andrew Selth, who is also known to some observers and analysts in Myanmar as William Ashton, and is a long-term "Myanmar Watcher". He has written a volume of articles and working papers on the Myanmar armed forces. He is probably the only scholar so far to give serious treatment to purely military matters of the Tatmadaw, such as armament, procurement, and combat capabilities. Drawing "entirely on open sources" with "no official status or endorsement", Andrew Selth divided his empirically rich monograph titled, *Transforming the Tatmadaw*, the first of its kind in studying the Tatmadaw, into eight chapters. By focusing on "the expansion and modernization of the armed forces", Andrew Selth did indeed fill some of the gaps in the existing literature. The monograph begins with an introduction that explains the difficulty of the study, and lays out the aim and objectives of the monograph. It is followed

by the defence expenditure of the Tatmadaw. Three subsequent chapters discuss force modernization of army, navy, and air forces. While chapter six discusses the debate about the alleged possession of “exotic weapons” by the Myanmar armed forces, the following chapter highlights the political and security imperatives influencing the Tatmadaw’s security perceptions. His last chapter is essentially a recapitulation of his findings and conclusion. Despite all these expansion and modernization programmes, Andrew questioned the military capabilities and professionalism of the Tatmadaw, given the fact that the Tatmadaw has been facing a number of critical issues such as intra-military rivalry,<sup>24</sup> an image problem, and the ethnic composition of the forces. In his second book on the Myanmar military, by revealing *Burma’s Secret Military Partners*, Andrew elaborates on the arms sales and transaction between Myanmar and four major “secret partners”, namely Germany, Singapore, Israel, and Pakistan. Selth concludes that the secret military partners “play a significant role in the country’s internal affairs in the face of considerable pressure for fundamental political and economic changes in Myanmar”.<sup>25</sup> In short, both books by Andrew Selth concern themselves primarily with the expansion and modernization of the Myanmar armed forces. However, Andrew argued that “the SLORC has devoted so much of Burma’s resources to the armed forces for purely domestic political reasons. All the regime’s rhetoric aside, the rapid expansion and modernization of the armed forces after 1988 seems to have been based primarily on the fear that it might lose its monopoly of political power”.<sup>26</sup> Based on his previous works, Andrew produced a book titled *Burma’s Armed Forces: Power without Glory*, which is organized into twelve chapters. Many chapters are reproduced from his previous works. The book begins with a historical background geopolitical setting. It is followed by chapters on defence policies and threat perceptions and structure and organization. The fourth chapter is on recruitment, training and doctrine. He devotes a chapter to military intelligence. In chapter six, Selth discusses the economic dimension of armed forces building. Chapters seven, eight and nine are on army, navy, and air force. Within each chapter, he discusses organization and armament. In chapter ten Andrew investigates the alleged possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) by the Tatmadaw. Chapter eleven is on the current state or status of the Tatmadaw, while the last chapter examines the political aspect of the Tatmadaw in Myanmar’s democracy movement. Andrew places the Tatmadaw into a broader political context. His assessment of the Tatmadaw’s transformation remains basically the same; it is for domestic political reasons. But he argues that the transformation has made the Tatmadaw an institution in power, but without glory.



To commemorate the golden jubilee of the Myanmar Armed Forces in 1995, the Tatmadaw began to produce a series on the official history of the Tatmadaw. By 2008, the Tatmadaw has produced eight volumes in the series, which cover the period up to 1997. A ninth volume is on its way. The manuscripts for the first three volumes, covering up to 1948, were prepared in the early 1960s and kept in the military archive. Only in 1994 and 1995 did these manuscripts finally surface as books for the general public. The Defence Services Historical Research Institute was assigned to produce more volumes on the history of the Tatmadaw. Therefore, three more volumes were produced in successive years: volume four for 1948–62; volume five for 1962–74; and volume six for 1974–88. Despite questionable arguments about the genealogy and historiography of the Tatmadaw, these books contribute to the better understanding of the Tatmadaw, especially in terms of its self-projected political role. These volumes also reveal arms procurement, military operations, and the structural expansion of the Tatmadaw. Yet, none of them discusses the military capability or combat readiness of the Tatmadaw. However, when the last two volumes — for 1988–93 and 1993–97 — came out, the structure of the books was completely changed; there was nothing about force modernization, such as arms procurement or expansion of the command structure. The last two volumes were merely the compilation of so-called nation building (actually infrastructure building) activities carried out by the Tatmadaw during the SLORC/SPDC period from all published sources. In recent years, a number of military officers have published their memoirs and shed some light on certain aspects of the Tatmadaw. But, again, they did not touch on force modernization in any historical period of post-colonial Myanmar.<sup>27</sup>

This work is based on my working papers published by the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre (SDSC) in Canberra; these papers are widely referred by scholars interested in the Tatmadaw. Here, I would like to argue that while the internal armed security threat to the state continues to play an important role, it is the external security threat that has given more weight to the expansion and modernization of the Tatmadaw since 1988. I would also argue that, despite its imperfections, the Tatmadaw is in the process of transforming itself from essentially a counter-insurgency force into a conventional one. Moreover, in order to understand the military capabilities of the Tatmadaw, it is equally important to look beyond its force modernization. This work examines the military capabilities and studies four aspects of the Tatmadaw in historical perspective, in contrast to existing works on state security and security perceptions in Myanmar: military doctrine and strategy, organization and force structure, armament

and force modernization, and military training and officer education. It is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, yet I sincerely hope that it will fill some of the gaps in the literature on the Tatmadaw.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Senior General Than Shwe's speech on the 54th Anniversary of Armed Forces Day, 27 March 1999.
- <sup>2</sup> The four political objectives are: stability of the State, community peace and tranquility, prevalence of law and order; national reconsolidation; emergence of a new enduring State Constitution; and building of a new, modern, developed nation in accord with the new State Constitution. The four economic objectives are: development of agriculture as the base and all-round development of other sectors of the economy as well; proper evolution of the market-oriented economic system; development of the economy, inviting participation in terms of technical know-how and investments from sources inside the country and abroad; and, the initiative to shape the national economy must be kept in the hands of the State and the national peoples. The four social objectives are: uplifting of the morale and morality of the entire nation; uplifting of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of its cultural heritage and national character; uplifting of the dynamism of patriotic spirit; and uplifting of health, fitness, and education standards of the entire nation.
- <sup>3</sup> Ministry of Information, *Myanmar Today* 1, no. 2 (May 1998): 15.
- <sup>4</sup> Senior General Than Shwe's speech on the graduation of the first intake of the Defence Services Institute of Technology, 11 April 1999.
- <sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Defence, *Dictionary of Military Terms* (Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1995), pp. 126, 242.
- <sup>6</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd revised ed. (New York: Meridian Printing, 1991), p. 322.
- <sup>7</sup> John A. Warden III, *The Air Campaign: Planning for Combat* (New York: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1989), p. 10.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Robert Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 46.
- <sup>10</sup> This information come from "lecture notes" used among air force officers. Regretably, no reference is made to original sources.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty First Century* (London: Frank Cass, 2004).
- <sup>15</sup> Norman Friedman, *Seapower as Strategy: Navies and National Interests* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2001).

- <sup>16</sup> Dorathy H. Guyot, "The Burma Independence Army: A Political Movement in Military Garb", in *Southeast Asia in World War II: Four Essays*, edited by Josef Silverstein (New Haven: Yale University, 1966); J.C Lebra, *Japanese Trained Armies of Southeast Asia: Independence and Volunteer Forces in World War II* (Hong Kong: Heinemann, 1977); Maung Maung, *Burmese Nationalist Movements 1940–1948* (Edinburgh: Kiscadale, 1989).
- <sup>17</sup> Josef Silverstein, *Burma: Military Rule and Politics of Stagnation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); F.K. Lehman, ed., *Military Rule in Burma since 1962* (Singapore: Maruzen Asia, 1981); Moshe Lissak, *Military Roles in Modernization: Civil-Military Relations in Thailand and Burma* (London: Sage Publications, 1976); Lucian Pye, "The Army in Burmese Politics", in *The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries*, edited by J.J. Johnson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962); Robert H. Taylor, "Burma", in *Military-Civilian Relations in South-East Asia*, edited by Zakaria Haji Ahmad and Harold Crouch (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985); Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Burma* (Hawaii: Hawaii University Press, 1987); Jon A. Wiant and David I. Steinberg, "Burma: The Military and National Development", in *Soldiers and Stability in Southeast Asia*, edited by J. Soedjati Djiwandono and Yong Mun Cheong (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988).
- <sup>18</sup> Robert Taylor, "Government Response to Armed Communist and Separatist Movements: Burma", in *Government and Rebellion in Southeast Asia*, edited by Chandran Jeshurun (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985); Robert H. Taylor, "Burma: Defence Expenditure and Threat Perceptions", in *Defence Spending in Southeast Asia*, edited by Chin Kin Wah (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1987); Robert H. Taylor, "Burma: Political Leadership, Security Perceptions and Policies", in *Leadership Perceptions and National Security: The Southeast Asian Experience*, edited by Mohammed Ayoob and Chai-Anan Samudavanija (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989).
- <sup>19</sup> Mya Maung, *Totalitarianism in Burma: Prospects for Economic Development* (New York: Paragon House, 1992); Christina Fink, *Living Silence: Burma under Military Rule* (London: Zed Book, 2001); Robert H. Taylor, ed., *Burma: Political Economy under Military Rule* (London: Hurst & Company, 2001); David I. Steinberg, *Burma: The State of Myanmar* (Washington D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2001); Mary P. Callahan, "Building an Army: The Early Years of the Tatmadaw", *Burma Debate*, vol. IV, no. 3, July/August 1997; David I. Steinberg, "Burma/Myanmar: Under the Military", in *Driven by Growth*, edited by James W. Morley, revised edition (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999); Robert H. Taylor, "The Evolving Military Role in Burma", *Current History*, March 1990; Robert H. Taylor, "The Military in Myanmar (Burma): What Scope for a New Role?", in *The Military, the State, and Development in Asia and the Pacific*, edited by Viberto Selochan (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); Josef Silverstein, "Burma's Struggle for Democracy: The Army against the People", in *The Military and Democracy in Asia and the Pacific*, edited by R.J. May and Viberto Selochan